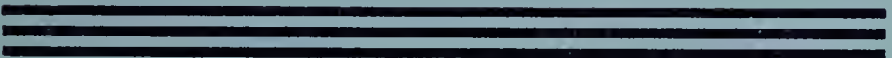


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The Missionary

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THE MISSIONARY CALL

"What constitutes a missionary call?" "How may I know whether I am called to be a missionary?" Perhaps no questions are more constantly asked by earnest young Christians in Bible institutes and missionary conferences than these. And not without good reason, for they are admittedly important questions. Nothing could be more vital for any person setting out for the mission field than to be clearly assured of the call and leading of the Lord in taking that step. Without such assurance one would be exposed to distressing doubts and to the subtle insinuations of the Evil One in facing the many difficulties and severe trials which are inseparable from missionary life and labor.

Yes, one needs to be unmistakably sure of the call of God to missionary service. But the vital point is to look in the right direction for the missionary call. For it must be said that there is a lot of fog and illusion and false sentiment, and at times also evasion and self-deception, about this question. One person *does not feel called*, while another *does feel called*, and both of them may be alike mistaken.

What, then, is the true nature and the right basis of a missionary call? We have no set formula or patent prescription to offer, but we turn with this problem, as with every other, to the Word of God for a solution. And in this instance let us turn in particular to the book of Acts as the God-given handbook of

guidance in all matters pertaining to the Christian missionary enterprise. We believe that the Macedonian vision and call given to the apostle Paul furnishes a clear and satisfactory model for a missionary call today. Let us then open our Bibles at Acts, chapter 16, and note the narrative and its teaching.

Paul and his colleagues were no slackers, no selfish, worldly Christians, but earnest, devoted witnesses and workers for the Lord. Had they been otherwise they would not have heard the call when it was given. The trouble with those who say they have never had a missionary call may be that they are living too far away from the Lord to hear Him when He does call. Yet Paul, foremost Christian of his day though he was, had never lifted up his eyes to see beyond the confines of his own continent. And so he was about to start out upon another Gospel tour in home territory which he had already covered before. But God halted him, gave him a vision of a land and need farther out, and called him from the home field to become a *foreign* missionary. Let us first take that lesson to heart.

Next let us note that that vision which came to Paul was a two-fold one.

1. *It was a heavenly vision.* It came from God, and was a revelation of God's will, of what God wanted done. And so later on we find Paul testifying that "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19). Now that is for us the first aspect, and a most vital one, of the true missionary call. How are we

to get it? Are we to expect and wait for the heavens to open, as in Paul's case, and such a vision to be seen, and such a voice to be heard, as he saw and heard? No, God does not need to deal with us now in this way, for He has given us His Word, through which He reveals His will and speaks to us. As someone has well said, the missionary call is not so much a *voice* as a *verse*.

We have, for instance, such plain statements as that "God so loved *the world*"; that "the field is *the world*"; that Jesus is "the light of *the world*"; that God is "not willing that *any* should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance". We are told that "*whosoever* shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved", and then follows that solemn and convicting series of "Hows" that affirm that only through the preaching of the Gospel can men anywhere hear, believe, call upon the name of the Lord, and be saved. (See Rom. 10:13-15). And these are but a few of a multitude of Scripture texts which convey the same truths, namely, man's universal sin and need of salvation, God's provision for all men in Christ, and the Gospel as the only means of escaping eternal doom and obtaining eternal life. Finally there is the Great Commission, Christ's "marching orders" to the Church, repeated five times, which commands the preaching of the Gospel *to every creature*, the evangelizing of *all nations*, the bearing witness to Him *unto the uttermost part of the earth*.

Surely the Lord has thus made unmistakably

plain what He expects of His Church, and the implication to *every member of that Church* is inescapable, namely, that he accept and carry out his personal share of the responsibility and task.

2. *It was an earthly vision.* That "man of Macedonia", so vividly portrayed before Paul's eyes, was God's way of bringing to his attention a land and people yonder in Europe in desperate and unrelieved spiritual need. Macedonia had her art, philosophy and religion; her schools and temples; her poets and sages; and much else of which she might be proud. But Macedonia had no Gospel, no saving message. *Macedonia needed Jesus Christ*, and the mute appeal of that vision was "*Come over . . . and help us*".

Are not the heathen and Moslem lands of the world today the modern counterpart of Macedonia in Paul's day? China, India, Japan and other countries have much that is worthy and commendable in their national history, their literature, their arts and industries, their vast store of empirical knowledge along many lines. But they have no Gospel, no saving message, except it be taken them from the God-favored lands of the West. Civilization will not meet their spiritual need, nor will education, nor anything else except the Christian Gospel. *They need, they must have Jesus Christ.* We Christians, and only we, can supply that need, and there is truth in the saying that "a need, knowledge of that need, and ability to meet that need constitute a *call*".

Now if you will put together these two aspects of the Macedonian vision, the heavenly and the earthly, you have the true basis of a genuine, a Scriptural missionary call. Such a call rests not on feeling, or sentiment, but on *fact*—the fact first of GOD'S WILL as revealed in the Word, and then the fact of HUMAN NEED as revealed in the world. Only upon an honest and serious consideration of these two great facts can any Christian reach an intelligent and conscientious decision as to where and what his part is in helping to carry out the one great business of the Church of Christ on earth, the giving of the Gospel to all mankind.

It is impressive to note the effect of that Macedonian vision upon Paul and his companions. Verse 10 reads: "After he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."

"After he had seen the vision" simply means after God had brought to Paul's attention facts which he had never before considered. There in another continent was a land which as yet had not had its first opportunity to hear of the only Saviour, while he was proposing to go again to people who had already heard. Not that all of them had accepted the message, or even that every individual in either Asia or Bithynia had been contacted. But they had at least to some extent been enlightened, while not a ray of Gospel light had reached Mace-

donia. And so the Spirit of God cried, "Fair play. No partiality. No premium upon souls in Asia and discount upon souls in Europe, but equal opportunity to hear the Gospel, equitable distribution of the Bread of Life to souls equally lost and needy, and for all of whom alike Christ died." And He is saying the same to Christians today in our land of Gospel light and privilege concerning the unevangelized millions across the sea. The *facts* about the heathen world which we well know, or can readily learn if we want to know them, are the *finger of God* pointing out our responsibility and duty.

"*Immediately*" speaks of prompt response to the voice of the Spirit, no dilly-dallying, no procrastination, but beginning at once to act when the voice of God has been heard. Oh the spiritual tragedies we could cite as a result of postponing the doing of God's revealed will!

"*We endeavored to go*" expresses a genuine purpose and honest effort to go, which is so different from that passive "willingness" which so many young people have professed, without treating the matter seriously and taking any practical steps toward going. Obstacles in the way are not to be regarded as indicating that it is not the Lord's will for one to go, for such obstacles are often both the devil's attempt to hinder and the Lord's test of the sincerity and strength of one's purpose.

"*Assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us . . .*" Note carefully this statement. "Assuredly gathering" is not the language of emotion

or sentiment, but rather of thoughtful reasoning and logical conclusion. So many seem to think of a missionary call as purely emotional, but this is a mistaken idea. God can, if He so chooses, guide us through our emotions, which He has given us. But He can just as truly lead us through our reasoning faculties, when these are surrendered to Him. He did so with Paul in the instance before us. The shutting of two doors in succession, and then the facts about Macedonia brought so strikingly to his attention, led him and his companions to conclude ("assuredly gather") that the Lord was leading in that direction. Nor were they mistaken, as the sequel clearly proved.

It was this same *logic of facts* that appealed to James Gilmour, pioneer missionary of Mongolia. Said he: "To me the question was not 'Why go?' but rather 'Why not go?' Even on the ground of common sense I seemed called to be a missionary. For is the kingdom not a great harvest field? Then I thought it only reasonable to seek the work where the work was most abundant and the workers were fewest".

Now as to where the place and what the part is in God's world-wide work for each reader of this message, we do not presume to say. But we are confident that the true and sure way for every honest Christian, fully surrendered to the Lord and without any reservation of mind, to discover this is upon the basis we have indicated, namely, the plan of God as revealed in His Word, and the measure in

which that plan has been carried into effect across the world. Moreover, we believe that upon this basis the normal, the logical course for every Christian whose age, health, qualifications and circumstances admit of it is to offer for foreign missionary service.

Military service affords a fitting parallel. This country at war declares a draft of man power, in terms of which every man of military age and fitness is conscripted for active service. The norm is to go, not to stay. The only honorable exempts from going are those disqualified for overseas service, or those who can serve their country's cause better by remaining at home. Exactly so should it be in the Church's missionary war. In view of Christ's imperative "GO" and the overwhelmingly greater need in the foreign fields than at home, loyalty to Him and love for lost souls constitute a compelling claim upon all Christians who are able to "GO" in person, and upon all others to "GO" by prayer and by purse to the full measure of their ability.

Just one point more. "Am I not to expect a special personal call to some particular field and sphere?" someone asks. Yes, when you are eligible for such. But those only are eligible who have taken the proper attitude of acceptance of the general call and placed themselves unreservedly at the Lord's disposal. Just as in the matter of salvation, you did not see your individual name in the Gospel invitation, but you saw the term "whosoever", and when you accepted that call the Holy Spirit particularized

it to you, giving you the assurance of salvation, so when you accept and respond to the general call, or command, of the Great Commission, you become a candidate for a personal call to some particular field and post, and the Holy Spirit will duly give you this as you wait upon Him for it. We could cite literally hundreds of instances of this in our own observation. The Lord will not keep in darkness concerning His specific will and plan any yielded and trusting child of His. His promises such as Psalm 32:8; 25:9; Jno. 7:17 and many others give ample assurance of this. Guidance will come, clear and certain, in His own time and way. But only when we can say with Eliezer of old, "I being in the way", can we add, "the Lord led me" (Gen. 24:27).

There is nothing more vitally important than to know the will of God for your life; and there is no joy, or peace, or satisfaction so great as to be completely in that will and in His appointed place for you in His blessed service.

"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

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